

09/928,546

Supply location **30** represents a food preparation area for supplying a number of consumer sites **31**, **32**, **33** which are in this case hospitals which are some distance from each other and from supply location **30**. The supply location receives raw materials and supplies by path W. At the supply location **30** food is prepared, cooled and plated and individual amounts for an individual consumer at one of the consumer sites are placed on a tray. Trays for delivery to a particular consumer location **31** are placed on one or more racks as described in relation to FIG. 1. The racked arrays are then loaded into a refrigerated transfer vehicle **35** whereby the food is transferred to location **31**. The vehicle is equipped with a load space incorporating suitable cooling means to ensure that trays of food in each rack does not exceed predetermined limits.

The transfer vehicle **35** then delivers along path S the racked arrays bearing the food to consumer site **31**. At an intermediate location **34** at the site each racked array is unloaded from the vehicle **35** and loaded into a regeneration trolleys **11** of the type described in connection with FIG. 1. The loaded trolley **11** is then moved closer to the location of the eventual consumers of the contents of the trolley **11**. The trolley **11** is connected to a power supply and is then powered up to enable the food content of the racked array to be automatically regenerated according to a predetermined program held in the control unit of the trolley. Once regeneration has been completed the trolley **11** is opened and the trays and their contents distributed to the recipients.

09/928,546

1. (AMENDED) A method of preparing, transporting and dispensing food between a series of remote locations, the method comprising the steps of:

- preparing the food for consumption at a first location;
- apportioning the food onto a plurality of trays at the first location;
- stacking the trays in a manually maneuverable rack, and providing the rack with a predetermined stacking arrangement of particular dimensions;
- loading the maneuverable rack onto a refrigerated vehicle for transportation to a second remote location;
- transferring the maneuverable rack, at the second location, into a moveable receptacle comprising at least one of heating and cooling means, and the receptacle being configured to receive at least one of the plurality of racks;
- relocating the moveable receptacle to a desired position;
- activating at least one of the heating and cooling means prior to dispensing of the food trays to consumers;
- dispensing the food trays to the consumers for consumption;
- collecting and re-stacking the trays in the rack situated within the receptacle;
- removing the at least one maneuverable rack from the moveable receptacle; and
- loading the at least one maneuverable rack back onto the transfer vehicle for transportation of the rack from the second location back to the first location.

2. (AMENDED) A method of preparing and transporting food for regeneration comprising the steps of:

- preparing food at a first location;
- apportioning the prepared food onto at least one tray;
- loading the at least one tray, bearing the apportioned food, onto a rack for receiving and supporting a plurality of trays in a predetermined alignment;
- providing a transfer vehicle for transporting the rack, loaded with the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food, from the first location to a second location spaced from the first location;
- transferring the rack from the transfer vehicle to a receptacle at the second location; and

09/928,546

rethermalizing the apportioned food while the at least one tray is supported by the rack at the second location.

7. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 2, further comprising the step of using a refrigerated vehicle as the transfer vehicle for transporting the rack loaded with the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food from the first location to the second location.

8. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 2, further comprising the step of using a refrigerated vehicle as ^{the} a transfer vehicle to transport the at least one tray.

12. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 2, further comprising the step of placing the transported rack, loaded with the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food, in storage prior to rethermalizing the apportioned food of the at least one tray.

15. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the steps of:

using the rack to collect the plurality of trays following consumption of the apportioned food by the consumers; and

returning the plurality of trays and the rack via the transport vehicle back to the first location for reuse and wherein the receptacle remains at the second location.

17. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 16, further comprising the step of, following consumption of the apportioned food by the consumers, collecting the plurality of trays with the rack located within the mobile receptacle.

19. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the step of placing the transported rack, loaded with the plurality of trays bearing the apportioned food, in storage prior to rethermalizing the apportioned food of the plurality of trays.

20. (AMENDED) The method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the steps of:

collecting the plurality of trays with the rack in the receptacle following consumption by the consumer; and

returning the plurality of trays and the rack back to the first location for reuse while leaving the receptacle at the second location.

21. (NEW) A method of preparing, transporting and dispensing food, the method comprising the steps of:

preparing the food for consumption at a first location;

apportioning the food onto a plurality of trays at the first location;

09/928,546

providing a maneuverable rack with a predetermined stacking arrangement of particular dimensions and stacking the plurality of trays, once apportioned with food, in the rack;

loading the rack, stacked with the plurality of trays, onto a refrigerated transport vehicle for transportation to a second remote location;

transferring the rack, at the second location, from the refrigerated transport vehicle to a moveable receptacle, and the moveable receptacle having at least one of heating means and cooling means, and the receptacle being configured to receive at least one rack;

relocating the moveable receptacle to a desired position;

activating one of the heating means and the cooling means to regenerate the apportioned food of the plurality of trays of the rack; and

dispensing the plurality of trays, containing the apportioned food, to consumers for consumption once the apportioned food is sufficiently regenerated;

collecting the plurality of trays with the rack in the receptacle following consumption by the consumer;

removing the at least one maneuverable rack from the moveable receptacle;

loading the at least one maneuverable rack back onto the transfer vehicle for transportation of the rack from the second location back to the first location for reuse while leaving the receptacle at the second location.

22. (NEW) A method of preparing, transporting and dispensing food between a series of remote locations, the method comprising the steps of:

preparing the food for consumption at a first location;

apportioning the food onto a plurality of trays at the first location;

stacking the trays in a manually maneuverable rack, and providing the rack with a predetermined stacking arrangement of particular dimensions;

loading the maneuverable rack onto a transfer vehicle for transportation to a second remote location;

transferring the maneuverable rack, at the second location, into a moveable receptacle comprising at least one of heating and cooling means, and the receptacle being configured to receive at least one of the plurality of racks;

relocating the moveable receptacle to a desired position;

09/928,546

activating at least one of the heating and cooling means prior to dispensing of the food trays to consumers;

dispensing the food trays to the consumers for consumption;

collecting and re-stacking the trays in the rack situated within the receptacle;

removing the at least one maneuverable rack from the moveable receptacle; and

loading the at least one maneuverable rack back onto the transfer vehicle for transportation of the rack from the second location back to the first location.

23. (NEW) A method of preparing and transporting food for regeneration comprising the steps of:

apportioning food onto at least one tray;

loading at a first location at least one tray bearing the apportioned food onto a rack for receiving and supporting the at least one tray;

loading the rack, containing the at least one tray, onto a transport vehicle for transportation to a remote location from the first location;

transporting the rack, containing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food, in the transport vehicle to the remote location;

after the rack has been transported to the remote location in the transport vehicle, transferring the rack from the transport vehicle to a receptacle, the receptacle being configured to receive at least one rack; and

activating a heating system and a cooling system to regenerate the apportioned food on the at least one tray on the rack that is positioned in the receptacle.

24. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, the heating system and the cooling system being located in the receptacle.

25. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, the heating system and the cooling system being demountably coupled to the receptacle.

26. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, further comprising the step of: dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food.

27. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 26, further comprising the step of: collecting the at least one tray after the at least one tray has been dispensed to a consumer for consumption of the food.

09/928,546

28. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 27, further comprising the step of:
returning the at least one tray and the rack to the first location.
29. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle.
30. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, further comprising the step of:
dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food;
the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle; and
the heating system and the cooling system being located in the receptacle.
31. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 23, further comprising the step of:
dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food;
the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle; and
the heating system and the cooling system being demountably coupled to the receptacle.
32. (NEW) A method of preparing and transporting food for regeneration comprising the steps of:
apportioning food onto at least one tray;
loading at a first location at least one tray bearing the apportioned food onto a rack for receiving and supporting the at least one tray;
loading the rack, containing the at least one tray, onto a transport vehicle for transportation to a remote location from the first location;
transporting the rack, containing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food, in the transport vehicle to the remote location;
after the rack has been transported to the remote location in the transport vehicle, transferring the rack from the transport vehicle to a receptacle, the receptacle being configured to receive at least one rack;
providing a heating system and a cooling system to regenerate the apportioned food on the at least one tray on the rack in the receptacle; and
activating at least one of the heating system and the cooling system to regenerate the apportioned food on the at least one tray on the rack that is positioned in the receptacle.

09/928,546

33. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, the heating system and the cooling system being located in the receptacle.

34. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, the heating system and the cooling system being demountably coupled to the receptacle.

35. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, further comprising the step of:
dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food.

36. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 35, further comprising the step of:
collecting the at least one tray after the at least one tray has been dispensed to a consumer for consumption of the food.

37. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 36, further comprising the step of:
returning the at least one tray and the rack to the first location.

38. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle.

39. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, further comprising the step of:
dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food;

the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle; and

the heating system and the cooling system being located in the receptacle.

40. (NEW) The method as claimed in claim 32, further comprising the step of:
dispensing the at least one tray bearing the apportioned food to a consumer for consumption of the food;

the transfer vehicle being a refrigerated vehicle; and

the heating system and the cooling system being demountably coupled to the receptacle.